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*CONTACT: Brian Gorman, NOAA Fisheries (206) 526-6613*

## **Spring Chinook returns are good for fourth year running**

**PORTLAND, Ore.** – The number of returning adult spring chinook salmon passing the Bonneville Dam on the Columbia River this year has topped 192,000, making it the fourth largest count since record keeping began in 1938.

“For the fourth year in a row, we’re getting very good news from the fish counters at Bonneville Dam,” said Brig. Gen. David Fastabend, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. “This is particularly encouraging since many of the returning spring chinook adults had to migrate to the ocean as juveniles during the drought of 2001.”

The 2003 return of upriver spring chinook passing the Bonneville Dam as of May 31 was 192,012. The 10-year average (1993-2002) for returning spring chinook during this time is 122,209. The returns for 2001 and 2002 were 391,367 and 268,813 respectively.

Biologists with NOAA Fisheries said good ocean conditions were a major factor in the strong numbers. However, the returns are an indicator that sufficient numbers of juvenile fish made it past the hydrosystem in 2001 to take advantage of the good conditions. Officials with the Federal Caucus – the ten regional federal agencies responsible for natural resource protection and salmon recovery in the Columbia River Basin – said focused regional efforts led by federal, state, tribal and local entities are contributing to the rising numbers of returning spring chinook.

“This year’s jack counts also give us hope that next year may be yet another year of strong returns,” said Bob Lohn, regional administrator for the NOAA Fisheries Northwest office in Seattle.

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Jacks are smaller chinook salmon that return to fresh water after only a year at sea. Considered to be bellwethers of their spawning class, jacks are an early indicator of the next year’s run size. The 2003 spring chinook jack count of 14,177 is the second largest on record and 236 percent higher than the ten-year average of 6,114.

Bonneville Power Administration  
Communications  
905 N.E. 11th Avenue  
Portland, OR 97232

**Mailing Address:**  
Bonneville Power Administration  
Media Relations - AC  
P.O. Box 3621  
Portland, OR 97208-3621  
<http://www.bpa.gov>

**Telephone:**  
(503) 230-5131  
**Fax:**  
(503) 230-5884

“This year’s good return of spring chinook is yet another indication that the investments in fish recovery are paying off,” said Steve Wright, administrator for the Bonneville Power Administration. “It also is a relief to find that the 2001 drought and our decisions to protect regional electric reliability have not harmed salmon recovery.”

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